NCA
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NORTH KOREAN LEADERSHIP SHUFFLE

ANNCR:

IN NORTH KOREA, THE RETIREMENT OF DEFENSE MINISTER CHOE HYON ADDS PROMINENCE TO OTHER LEADERSHIP CHANGES IN THAT COUNTRY IN RECENT WEEKS. VOA'S JOSEPH KUN HAS THE DETAILS IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

PYONGYANG'S OFFICIAL NEWS AGENCY LAST MONTH ANNOUNCED THAT NORTH GENERAL CHOE HYON HAD BEEN RELIEVED OF HIS DUTIES AS DEFENSE MINISTER FOR HEALTH REASONS. GENERAL CHOE, HOWEVER, STILL HOLDS THE POSITION OF CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE COMMISSION. HE WAS REPLACED AS DEFENSE MINISTER BY ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL O CHIN-U.

IN MARCH, THE NORTH KOREAN NEWS AGENCY ANNOUNCED THE DEATH BY ACCIDENT OF ONE OF THE LEADING MILITARY FIGURES, GENERAL NAM IL. NAM WAS CHIEF OF STAFF OF NORTH KOREAN FORCES DURING THE KOREAN WAR.

IN APRIL, SIXTY-FOUR-YEAR-OLD PREMIER KIM IL WAS RELIEVED OF HIS POST, ALSO FOR HEALTH REASONS, AND WAS NAMED NORTH KOREA'S FIRST VICE PRESIDENT. HIS SUCCESSOR IS PAK SONG-CHOL -- ALSO SIXTY-FOUR -- WHO SERVED AS FOREIGN MINISTER IN THE 1960'S. EARLIER THIS YEAR, PAK LED THE NORTH KOREAN PARTY DELEGATION TO THE TWENTY-FIFTH SOVIET PARTY CONGRESS. THE ASSIGNMENT OF PAK SONG-CHOL TO THE PREMIERSHIP BRINGS PYONGYANG'S LEADING EXPERT IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO A TOP CABINET POSITION.

ALL OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE LEADERSHIP SHUFFLE REPRESENT THE SO-CALLED "REVOLUTIONARY OLD-GUARD"...PEOPLE WHO FOR OVER THREE DECADES THEY HAVE BEEN CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH THE POLICIES OF PRESIDEN KIM IL-SUNG. THEIR LOYALTY TO THE NORTH KOREAN LEADER HAS NEVER BEEN QUESTIONED BY FOREIGN ANALYSTS OF THE KOREAN POLITICAL SCENE.

BOTH FORMER PREMIER KIM IL AND GENERAL CHOE ARE AMONG THE OLDEST MEMBERS OF THE NORTH KOREAN LEADERSHIP GROUP. AND THEIR TRANSFERS TO RELATIVELY FIGURE-HEAD POSITIONS MAY REPRESENT THE BEGINNING OF A MOVEMENT TO OPEN UP POSITIONS FOR YOUNGER MEN. AMONG THIS GROUP IS KIM JONG-IL, THE SON OF PRESIDENT KIM. IN ANY EVENT, FOREIGN OBSERVERS BELIEVE THERE MAY BE MORE CHANGES LEADING UP TO THE NORTH KOREAN SIXTH PARTY CONGRESS, WHICH IS EXPECTED TO BE HELD LATER THIS YEAR.

JS/RCS